

Let it be remembered that the repetition of Gayatrimantra will gradually result in greater concentration and will-power. Equipped with such an invigorated mind one can achieve better success in lesser time.



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Upanayana (ISBN 978-81-7823-453-3) Rs. 8.00

UPANAYANA

Sandhyāvandana
and
Gāyatrīmantrajapa



Swami Harshananda

Om Ramakrishna

11.4.2010

UPANAYANA

SANDHYĀVANDANA
&
GĀYATRĪMANTRAJAPA

Swami Harshananda



Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Chennai - 600 004

Published by :
The President
Sri Ramakrishna Math
Mylapore, Chennai - 4

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II-2M 3C-1-2009
ISBN 978-81-7823-453-3

Printed in India at
Sri Ramakrishna Math Printing Press
Mylapore, Chennai - 4

To The Reader

The Upanayana sacrament has somehow survived among the dvijas (the 'twice born' class) and that too among the brāhmaṇas even now. However, unfortunately, neither an awareness of its significance nor a reverent faith in its performance is seen among the votaries. The reasons for this are two: The elders themselves lack a basic knowledge about it, nor do they seem to entertain much love for it. Hence they are not competent enough to enlighten their inquiring children about it. Secondly, even among the priests, whose duty it is to keep alive these religious traditions

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in the society, a basic knowledge about them as also austerity in personal life are fast disappearing. Consequently they too have failed to deliver the goods.

This booklet is a humble attempt to mitigate this deficiency.

All those who cherish a fond faith for Hinduism—the Eternal Religion—are requested to read it and give it to others, especially the boys undergoing the sacrament of upanayana.

S.H.



Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation

Sounds like	Sounds like
अ a-o in son	ग g-g (hard) in go
आ ā-a in master	घ gh-gh in log-hut
इ i-i in if	ङ ṅ-ng in singer
ई ī-ee in feel	च c-ch in chain
उ u-u in full	छ ch-chh in
ऊ ū-oo in boot	catch him
ऋ ṛ-somewhat between r and ri	ज j-j in judge
ए e-ay in May	झ jh-dgeh in hedgehog
ऐ ai-y in my	ञ ñ-n (somewhat) as in French
ओ o-o in oh	ट ṭ-t in ten
औ au-ow in now	ठ ṭh-th in ant-hill
क k-k in keen	ड ḍ-d in den
ख kh-ckh in blockhead	ढ ḍh-dh in godhood

U 2

v

Sounds like	Sounds like
ण ṇ-n in under	य y-y in yard
त t-t in French	र r-r in run
थ th-th in thumb	ल l-l in luck
द d-th in then	व v-v in avert
ध dh-the in breathe	श ś-sh in reich
न n-n in not	(German)
प p-p in pen	ष ṣ-sh in show
फ ph-ph in loop-hole	स s-in sun
ब b-b in bag	ह h-in hot
भ bh-bh in abhor	म् m-in sum
म m-m in mother	: ḥ-h in half



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UPANAYANA

What is Saṁskāra?

Hinduism declares that mokṣa or liberation from the cycle of birth and death is the final goal of life. It is the same as God-realisation, resulting in the enjoyment of eternal bliss. Whatever effort is put forth in that direction is called 'sādhana.' Our body and our mind are the chief instruments in this endeavour. Saṁskāra is nothing but the process of purifying and refining these instruments, making them fit for sādhana.

The word 'saṁskāra' literally means 'to do well.' A block of stone when subjected to 'saṁskāra' by an expert sculptor becomes a

lovely image. Similarly rice, sugar and milk get converted into a delicious pudding in the hands of an expert cook.

Basic materials like the block of stone, or, rice, sugar and milk, are called 'prakṛti.' When the stone-block is broken into pieces or rice becomes putrefied or milk gets sour, they become 'vikṛti' ('deformed'), become useless. We want saṁskṛti and *not* vikṛti. We want 'saṁskāra' which can convert 'prakṛti' into 'saṁskṛti' and not its opposite, 'vikāra' (distortion, deformation).

Sixteen Saṁskāras

Such Saṁskāras (called 'sacraments') that purify and refine a human being, making him fit for the life here and hereafter, are sixteen.

Hence the term 'Ṣoḍaśa-saṁskāras' (ṣoḍaśa = 16). Among them upanayana, vivāha (marriage) and antyeṣṭi (death-rites) are the most important ones.

Meaning of the Word 'Upanayana'

'Upanayana' means 'leading' the disciple to the guru or the Vedic teacher (upa = near; nayana = leading, taking). Or, it can also mean providing him with an 'additional eye,' the 'eye of knowledge and wisdom' (upa = additional, nayana = eye). That is, in addition to the two physical eyes he already has, give him a third eye, that of knowledge and wisdom, through proper education. Consequently, the sacrament of the beginning of formal education too, has been called by the same name, ie., 'upanayana.'

'Mauñjibandhana' and 'Brahmopadeśa' are two other terms, sometimes used, to denote this sacrament. Since a girdle made of the muñja grass is tied round the waist of the boy undergoing the upanayana ceremony, to support the kaupīna or loin-cloth, the ceremony, itself is termed 'Mauñjī-bandhana.'

The word 'Brahma' stands for the Vedas as also for the Gāyatrīmantra which contains their quintessence. Since, in this saṁskāra, the Gāyatrīmantra is taught to the novice, the word 'Brahmopadeśa' is quite an appropriate expression for the rite also.

Important Steps of Upanayana

The novice undergoing upanayana is called 'vaṭu.' The prescribed age-limit for the vaṭu is

between 7 and 16 years. It is best to perform upanayana in the spring season (around March-April).

There are quite a few injunctions and steps in the process of the upanayana ceremony. A few of them—the more important ones—may be set out here.

On the day prior to the upanayana, the parents of the vaṭu should perform the worship of Ganeśa and the family deity.

On the day of the upanayana, the vaṭu and his mother are to eat from the same leaf-plate. It is for the last time, that they can eat like this. It signifies the end of the childhood days of the vaṭu and a life of unbridled conduct. Hereafter he cannot act and behave as he likes, but should

subject himself to socio-religious norms of conduct.

Then, he has to get his head shaven, leaving a śikhā (tuft of hair) at the appropriate place, take bath and wear a new set of dress comprising kaupīna (loin-cloth), dhoti and valli (upper cloth). A girdle made of muñja grass also should be worn round the waist. It is this that is technically called mauñjibandhana. This indicates the beginning of a life of brahmacharya or self-control, of which celibacy is the most important aspect.

Next comes the wearing of the yajñopavīta or the sacred thread (janeu in Hindi). The ācārya (chief priest) makes the vaṭu wear it with appropriate mantras so that it hangs from the left shoulder to the right loin.

This sacred thread comprises three strands of strings and the knot resembles a cow in the sitting posture. At the time of the upanayana a small piece of kṛṣṇājina (skin of a black antelope) is also tied to this sacred thread.

In the ancient days people used to wear the skin of a black antelope or an upper cloth during yajñas or sacrifices. The yajñopavīta is a remnant of that practice. When the vaṭu wears it, he should think, 'From today my life is like a yajña or sacrifice. I will dedicate it to the welfare and service of the society!' The three strands stand for the three Vedas thereby reminding him that he has to study them and incorporate their message in his life. They may also represent purity and control of body, speech and mind,

which again should be dedicated to the service of the society.

The next step is holding the daṇḍa or the staff made of palāśa wood (*Butea Frondosa*).

Actually the vaṭu is expected to keep it throughout his student-life as an inseparable companion. It stands for dama or control of the sense-organs at the psychological level. In his day-to-day life at the gurukula, it helps him to take care of the cows of the household and also comes in handy in times of dangers as a weapon for self-protection.

After the vaṭu circumambulates the sacred fire and offers sacrificial fuel into it, the ācārya administers him certain vows. They are: performing ācamana (ceremonial sipping of water with

certain mantras) before any religious rite, control of speech, avoiding sleep during the day and offering fuel sticks into the sacred fire and so on.

Then comes 'Sāvitrī Upadeśa,' the heart of the whole sacrament. It means imparting the Gāyatrīmantra. 'Savitṛ' or 'Savitā' means God the creator. He is identified with the sun. He is the Supreme Lord residing in the heart of the sun. Hence the real name of the mantra is 'Sāvitrīmantra.' Since it was revealed to the sage Viśvāmitra, for the first time in the Vedic metre known as the Gāyatrī, the mantra itself has been identified with it and has popularly come to be known as the 'Gāyatrīmantra.' The ācārya has to teach it to the vaṭu, little by little, with proper intonation until he picks it up completely.

Next comes the offering of the fuel sticks into the duly consecrated fire (That has already been prepared by the ācārya) with proper mantras signifying prayers for long life, brilliance, intellectual acumen, general competence, name and fame as also (in course of time) good offspring.

Last comes the begging of food by the vaṭu from his own mother and other elderly ladies of the family. Since he has to beg his food as long as he lives in the gurukula, this ritual begging is a trial run as it were, for it. The food got by begging is to be offered to the ācārya first and consume only that given to him as his share.



SANDHYĀVANDANA

Meaning of the Term

The junction between night and day (i.e., dawn) and that between day and night (i.e., dusk) are called 'sandhyā.' The former is known as 'prātas-sandhyā' and the latter as 'sāyam-sandhyā.' The worship of Sūrya (the sun) to be performed during these two periods is called 'Sandhyāvandana' ('obeisance to the Sun-god during the periods of sandhyā'). In addition one more is added, the 'mādhyaṃnika,' a rite that is to be performed during noon when the sun is right above our head.

The vaṭu who has undergone the upanayana ceremony, as also the house-holders (among the dvijas or those belonging to the first three castes)

are expected to perform this sandhyā ritual three times a day, as a sacred duty.

These three—the prātassandhyā, the mādhyaṃnika and the sāyamsandhyā—have many steps in common. However, in practice, only the first and the last have survived. The scriptures have provided for this modification.

Various Steps

After taking bath and wearing the traditional religious dress (dhoti and chadar or uttarīya) one should apply the religious marks (like the vibhūti or the ūrdhvapundra) as per one's family traditions, on the forehead, and sit on the seat (kept aside and to be used only for such religious purposes). Though there are differences in the procedure and the various steps to be followed, as per differing traditions,

the six steps common to all will be delineated here. The detailed procedure has to be learnt from the family priest or the elders in the family.

These six steps are: ācamana, prāṇāyāma, mārjana, arghyapradāna, gāyatrījapa and sūryopasthāna.

a) Ācamana

Ācamana is the ceremonial sipping of water from the right hand cupped in the shape of the face of a cow, to the chanting of appropriate mantras like 'Keśavāya svāhā' and touching specified parts of the body for ritual purification. This ācamana is a general purificatory act that precedes every religious undertaking.

b) Prāṇāyāma

Prāṇāyāma is control of the prāṇic energy through the regulation of the breathing process

as detailed in the works on yoga. Pūraka (inhalation), kumbhaka (retention) and recaka (exhalation) are its three steps. The Gāyatrīmantra along with the vyāhṛtis is used in prāṇāyāma to keep time. Prāṇāyāma helps in the control of mind also.

c) *Mārjana*

Literally, 'mārjana' means cleansing or purifying. It consists of sprinkling of water on specified parts of the body with the mantra 'āpo hiṣṭhā....' This process will make the body ceremonially pure and fit for the ritualistic act.

d) *Arghyapradāna*

Any object fit for being offered in ritualistic worship is 'arghya.' However, in a more

technical sense, it is the offering of water taken in the two hands cupped together, by repeating the Gāyatrīmantra and addressing the Sun-god (i.e., Savitā or God the creator, in the orb of the sun). This is just to show our gratitude to the Sun-god who is our primary life-support.

e) *Gāyatrījapa*

This is the most important part of the Sandhyā ritual. Its primary steps are: Karanyāsa, aṅganyāsa, dhyāna and japa.

'Nyāsa' means 'to keep or to place.' It is aimed at filling the fingers of the hand and other limbs like the head and heart with the divine power of the deities.

Dhyāna is meditation on the deity as per the detailed description given in the hymn (called 'dhyānaśloka') while repeating it. The goddess

Gāyatrī within the orb of the sun is the deity here.

After dhyāna comes japa or repetition of the Gāyatrīmantra. While doing japa, dhyāna on the form of the goddess should be continued. It is better to repeat the mantra 1008 times, or at least 108 times per sitting.

f) *Sūryopasthāna*

Repeating the prayer addressed to the deity Gāyatrī (in the orb of the sun) in the standing posture, facing the sun, is 'sūryopasthāna' (upasthāna = standing). This is the last rite of bidding farewell to the goddess after having invoked her and satiated her through japa.

Apart from the sun, the mountain Meru is sometimes described as her abode.



UPĀKARMA

In the ancient days, the brahmacārins (Vedic students) used to stay in the houses of their teachers and study the Vedas. After a few months of study and a short holiday, when they resumed their study, they were expected to perform a short ritual called 'upākarma,' signifying the restarting of their studies. The word 'upākarma' means 'upakrama' or 'prārambha,' or beginning.

Now-a-days, it has remained just an annual ritual. The procedure comprises the following steps: saṅkalpa (religious resolve), worship of Gaṇapati, oblations to nine deities like Sāvitrī,

Brahmā and Śraddhā, homa with a mixture of barley and curds with some specific mantras from the *Rgveda*, wearing of a new yajñopavīta and discarding the old one, preferably in the waters of a river or a tank.

The same mantra and procedure for changing the yajñopavīta given here can be used at other times also, to discard a worn-out or a dirty or a broken one and wear a new one. It is, of course, better to get it done by a priest or by a competent elder who knows the process.



GĀYATRĪ-MANTRA-JAPA

What is Gāyatrī?

It is known as 'Gāyatrī' since it protects (=trāyate) one who chants it (=gāyantam) correctly as per the rules of Vedic intonation. This is the etymological definition of the word.

It is also called 'Sāvitrīmantra' since it is a prayer addressed to Savitṛ or God the creator. The sun is also called Savitṛ or Savitā, because it is due to him (or the power of God in him) that the whole world and all of us, are able to live.

This mantra was revealed for the first time to the sage Viśvāmitra, in a new metre called 'Gāyatrī.' Hence the mantra itself came to be

known as 'Gāyatrīmantra.' It is also called 'Sāvitrīmantra' since it concerns the deity Savitṛ.

The Mantra and Its Meaning

The first part of the mantra comprises the three vyāhrtis:

Om bhūr bhuvas suvaḥ (Om, bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ, suvaḥ).

When the Gāyatrī is used for prāṇāyāma, the number of vyāhrtis increases from 3 to 7.

Literally 'vyāhrti' means 'uttering.' Brahmā the creator, is said to have uttered these at the beginning of creation. Hence the appellation 'vyāhrtis.'

The second part is the Sāvitrīmantra:

tat savitur vareṇyam, bhargo devasya
dhīmahi, dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt ||

Sometimes, a third part called 'Gāyatrī-śiras' is also added. Its use is also in the process of prāṇāyāma. It is:

Om āpo jyotī raso'mṛtam brahma
bhūrbhuvas suvarom ||

However, in the mantra used for japa, only the three vyāhrtis and the Sāvitrīmantra are utilised.

A general summary of the mantra may now be given:

We meditate upon the divine effulgence of Savitā (God, the creator of the three worlds,

the earth, the heaven and the intervening space as indicated by the three vyāhrtis) signified by the Praṇava or Ōṅkāra (and existing in the orb of the sun). May he impel our intellects in the right direction (i.e., towards himself)!

Whatever we want to achieve in our life, the first and foremost requirement is that our intellect, our understanding, must be in an excellent form! Repetition of the Gāyatrīmantra with faith and reverence will help not only in cleansing the mind but also in achieving greater concentration.

The mode and method of its repetition must be learnt from a competent teacher.

Puraścaraṇa

Puraścaraṇa is the technical name given to a particular (ceremonial) mode of repeating the Gāyatrīmantra in order to secure certain special fruits or results. The following are the usual steps involved in it:

Daily rituals like the Sandhyāvandana, worship of the goddess Gāyatrī, japa of Gāyatrīmantra, homa (fire ritual), tarpaṇa (offering of water ceremonially) and feeding of the brāhmaṇas.

It should be undertaken, however, under the guidance of experts.



SOME QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Who are the dvijas?

The word 'dvija' means 'twice-born.' The first birth is from the mother's womb; and the second is the spiritual birth brought about by the upanayana sacrament. Hence, all those who have undergone the upanayana ceremony—the brāhmaṇas, the kṣatriyas and the vaiśyas—are 'dvijas.' However, the term is more generally applied to the brāhmaṇas.

The brāhmaṇas of Vedic learning are called 'vipras' and the vipras with an excellent conduct are known as 'śrotriyas.'

Who is a true brāhmaṇa?

A true brāhmaṇa is one who has realised Brahman or God. In other words, it is only a man

of realisation, a jīvanmukta (one liberated even while living in the body), that can be called a true brāhmaṇa. However this is an ideal definition!

'Brahma' also means the Vedas. Hence one who has studied the Vedas well, and is following their injunctions in his life, is also a brāhmaṇa.

In course of time, all those who have been born in the brāhmaṇa caste, are being labelled as 'brāhmaṇas!' However, they have to earn that status by saṃskāra or refinement through the sacraments and a pure life as per the dictates of the scriptures.

Can women undergo the upanayana sacrament? Do they have the competence for Gāyatrījapa?

The Vedas contain the names of as many as 27 women-sages! Women did, in the ancient

days, undergo the sacrament of upanayana and studied the Vedas. Instances are not wanting where women teachers—called *ācāryās*—of great learning and wisdom, were occupying the posts of vice-chancellors and professors in the forest academies. Hence one can safely conclude that they too have the right of the upanayana sacrament and the *japa* of the *Gāyatrīmantra*. The practice has somehow been lost during the later periods, but can be restarted.

Can the Śūdras be initiated into the Gāyatrīmantra?

Who exactly the *śūdras* were in the Hindu society is a complicated question. One of the explanations offered is that there was no *varṇa* system in the early Vedic society and the four

varṇas (castes) evolved later. Some religious works have permitted even the so-called *śūdras*—or, at least, some sections among them—to have upanayana and keep the Vedic fires.

Due to the spread of modern education and better standards of living brought about by economic progress, there is a gradual levelling up of the backward sections of the society who were once classed among the *śūdras*. Hence, if persons from among these so-called *śūdras* who are educated and cultured, express an earnest desire to receive the *Gāyatrīmantra* and to perform its *japa* for their own spiritual upliftment, opportunities must be provided for the same. They can receive the mantra from competent persons and start practising it. Since

the mantra itself is a general prayer to God for the purification of one's mind, there should be no bar in receiving it from a fit person and practising its *japa*. Such a step can contribute significantly to the unity and solidarity of the Hindu society. The abbots of orthodox monasteries and Hindu religious institutions should display greater generosity and spirit of accommodation in this regard. It may be of interest to note here that Swami Vivekananda, the patriot-prophet of Modern India, arranged for the upanayana ceremony in the Belur Math, (Head-quarters of the Ramakrishna Order) for a number of boys and young men from certain castes that had missed it for several generations. This can rightly be called '*dvijīkaraṇa*'

(converting one into a '*dvija*' or 'twice-born'). It can set a precedent and be a model for the heads of monasteries and other Hindu religious organisations.

There are some who are brāhmaṇas by birth but who have not had the upanayana sacrament. Then, there are others who have completely given up sandhyāvandana and Gāyatrījapa. Can these persons be considered as brāhmaṇas?

Certainly not! The question of *brāhmaṇahood* has to be decided as per the sacred books of the Hindus and the opinions of the sages. Actually all are considered by them as *śūdras* at the time of birth and will become *brāhmaṇas* only by the sacrament of upanayana.

In the olden days the brāhmaṇas were the role model for the entire Hindu society due to their austere life, scriptural learning and spiritual wisdom. But, in course of time they gradually slipped from the ideal which had a devastating effect on the society as a whole. Even now, in spite of modern education and taking to various professions for a living, if they stick to the path of satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness) and keep up the brāhminical rites like the Sandhyāvandana, they will not only be elevating themselves spiritually but also contributing greatly to the spiritual evolution of the society. The earlier they realise this responsibility, the better will it be for the whole society.

What is your advice to the new novitiates who have just undergone the upanayana sacrament?

Never give up Sandhyāvandana and the Gāyatrijapa!

There is no substance in the argument that due to lack of time, they have to be cut short or even given the go-by! Don't you find enough time for listening to the cricket commentary or for viewing the television or for useless gossiping? If such activities are given up, you will definitely find plenty of time for spiritual pursuits.

Again, let it be remembered that the repetition of the Gāyatrīmantra will gradually result in greater concentration and will-power. Equipped with such an invigorated mind one can achieve better success in life in lesser time. ❀

EMOTIONAL INTEGRATION OF THE HINDU SOCIETY

Due to various reasons—both external and internal—emotional integration seems to be fading away in the Hindu society. Though the five fingers in our hand are different from one another, do they not mutually co-ordinate and work for a single purpose? Similarly we should learn to ignore the differences amongst us due to caste, education, wealth, family pride and profession, and to learn to get integrated emotionally. An awareness of our spiritual heritage can help us greatly in this regard.

